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AUTHOR Phillips, A. Craig
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ABSTRACT

A. Craig Phillips, superintendent of public instruction of North Carolina, declares that a major priority of the National Institute of Education is to collaboratively develop with state education agencies an adequate system of dissemination, diffusion, and adoption of improved practices. The NIE Advisory Panel on Dissemination and Utilization and the CCSSO Task Force on NIE have analyzed the situation and made similar recommendations. Three actions must be taken at the federal level to provide legislative authority for combining categorical program funds set aside for dissemination. Two steps are needed at the state level to make a better system a reality. The cooperative efforts should not become a public-relations tool nor a conduit for federally developed information. It must be a system for sharing information about successful educational practices no matter where the practice was developed. (SK)

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"State Education Agencies and the
National Institute of Education"

Presented by the Honorable A. Craig Phillips
Superintendent of Public Instruction
State of North Carolina

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Washington, D.C.

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One of the most persistent problems facing the educational institution is that of how we systematically and continuously improve educational practice in our public schools. Lack of desire for systematic improvement is not a problem. Evidence abounds that the National Congress, leaders in the U.S. Office of Education, Chief State School Officers, State Legislators, state and local boards of education, professional educators, and the public at large are not only ready for systematic improvement but are demanding it.

In recent years, millions of dollars have been appropriated for the purpose of reinvigorating educational practice so that learning experiences for millions of children and youth can be more stimulating and more-effective. We can point with pride to places where dramatic improvement has occurred in isolated sites but we cannot claim success in sharing those successful practices and seeing them subsequently adopted in numerous other sites. We have not yet developed an adequate system through wihich educators can:

1. Become aware of a comprehensive array of recently developed effective practices -- practices for which evidence of effectiveness exists.
2. Judge the feasibility of adapting and adopting an identified practice in a given local educational agency.

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3. Secure additional start-up resources and technical assistance to support adoption of the replacement practice.

Finding a way to collaboratively develop with State Education Agencies an adequate system for dissemination, diffusion, and adoption of improved practices is one of the major priorities of the National Institute of Education. I have had the privilege of serving on NIE's Advisory Panel on Dissemination and Utilization. That panel and a CCSSO Task Force on NIE chaired by Superintendent Lyman Ginger of Kentucky for the Chief State School Officers have analyzed the situation which now confronts us. Those two bodies came up with similar analyses. I'll mention a few of the major factors. I do encorage you, if you have not already done so, to study carefully the recent NIE planning document on Building Capacity for Renewal and Reform in which a detailed analysis appears.

At the Federal level in recent years -- while there has been much interest in and some resources invested in dissemination and diffusion -- those efforts have been fragmented across various categorical programs. Many legislative acts require dissemination of results, but as categorically funded programs have been implemented, we have not achieved coordinated polling of diffusion efforts across programs. The National Center for Educational Communication under the leadership of Dr. Lee Burchinal initiated a well planned and promising start toward systematic orchestration of dissemination. That operation has been transferred to NIE and is now known as the Task Force on Dissemination. Federal leadership for that critical function now rests with NIE and many of us are encouraged by the apparent desire of highly competent NIE staffers to work closely with State Education Agencies to formulate realistic plans for building effective dissemination systems. While that thrust is promising and exciting,

it is very apparent that there are some changes which will have to occur at the federal and state levels before that promise becomes a reality:

1. At the federal level when resources are made available for development and diffusion of improved educational practices through different legislative acts, there must be a provision for using dissemination monies in tandem across federal programs. For example, Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Title VI of that act, Title I, the Cooperative Research Act, certain parts of Title V and set aside monies under the Vocational Educational Act all address dissemination and diffusion. But when the U.S. Office of Education prepares specifications for the preparation of State Plans to implement those acts, the specifications appear sometimes to be drafted in isolation by a diversity of Division Chiefs and Branch Chiefs in a way which makes it virtually impossible to generate at the state level one coherent plan which maximizes utilization of all the resources which were allocated for a common purpose through several categorical programs.
2. Frequently, the specifications for state plans are so complex and require such lengthy negotiations that approval and release of appropriations occurs very late in the operational year. Then shortly thereafter, program administrators at the state level may be confronted with a new set of priorities from the federal level for the next operational years, planning for a sustained, continuous effort toward one common purpose, like dissemination, is made extremely difficult.

3. Legislative or administrative constraints attached to each categorical program result in an inadequate provision of resources for dissemination, diffusion, and adoption. For example, Title I legislation sets a limit of 1% of a state's entitlement to be spent at the state level for all administrative functions including dissemination. All other resources must flow through to local agencies. Title III legislation sets a limit of 7 1/2% of a state's entitlement for all administrative, reasearch and development functions, evaluation, functioning of the State Advisory Council, and dissemination/diffusion. All other resources must flow through to local agencies. These constraints leave totally inadequate support for a viable dissemination/diffusion operation at the state level.

ACTIONS MUST BE TAKEN AT THE FEDERAL LEVEL TO PROVIDE LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY FOR COMBINING CATEGORICAL PROGRAM FUNDS SET ASIDE FOR DISSEMINATION.

Now, let's take a look at some things which must happen at the state level so that the system we dream of can become reality:

1. First, many state education agencies don't yet have the capacity to serve as a viable research and development intermediary between the federal structure and local school systems. Yet, I hasten to add that state education agencies are in a unique position to provide the leadership for planning and building dissemination and utilization systems. State educational agencies can also -- because of their unique authority for educational affairs in the states -- move rapidly to provide technical assistance to local systems to achieve effective use of new

research and development products.

2. In order to become a viable intermediary in the process, it seems that we need to seriously consider in each of our agencies several necessary steps which can be taken with resources already coming to us:

   (a) In each SEA, a high level policy administrator could be designated as the person responsible for developing the state dissemination system. The Chief State School Officer would need, I believe, to delegate sufficient authority to that person to establish a useful system for implementation of improved practices in all categorical program areas represented in the SEA, regardless of the funding sources for the various programs. An important mandate to the dissemination administrator would be to eliminate duplication across fragments of programs and concentrate pooled resources in a more effective dissemination network.

   (b) In each SEA, we should put a high priority on having direct access to communications networks and information retrieval systems.

   (c) In each of our states, we need to urge our Legislatures to provide more adequate state resources for developing dissemination/diffusion/adoption networks -- including state grants to local agencies to pay for those additional one-time costs which are incurred when one changes a practice or procedure.

   (d) We also need in the states to require the inclusion of our most recent data about inproved practices in all SEA planning for teacher certification, teacher training,

SEA staff development, any major SEA reorganization, and in any new program initiatives.

I have indicated some things which need to occur at both the fedral and state levels. I would like to comment briefly on the purposes of an effective dissemnation system and throw up some warning flags about what that system should not become.

As I see it, and as I believe others see it, an effective dissemination system is a set of organized procedures, planned cooperatively and articulated carefully between federal, state and local agencies for ensuring the implementation of improved practices and programs in schools. We must guard against building a system so narrowly conceived that it becomes only a source of statistical information to support management decisions. We must also guard against its becoming nothing more than a public relations tool which creates interest and awareness. Creation of awareness about improved practices is necessary but not sufficient. We must go beyond that phase and develop the capacity to local systems when the local system has selected a specific practice it desires to adopt or adapt.

The dissemination system we build must not be primarily a conduit for federally developed information. It must be a system for sharing information about successful educational practices no matter where the practice was developed. Yet, the system must be more than a research information system. We can no longer naively believe that availability of information will automatically result in improved practice.

Building an effective dissemination system is an enormously complex task. I don't claim to have many of the answers to the difficult questions which face us in this task, but I am pleased to have the opportunity to participate in an effort which holds great promise for dramatic improvement in what happens with millions of children and youth in schools across the nation. By jointly sponsoring this conference, the National Institute for Education and the Council of Chief State School Officers have provided a forum in which a meaningful exchange of ideas can occur. I believe that you and I have an obligation to work diligently during the conference to clarify the relationships between NIE and State Education Agencies which are essential to success in this effort.